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MY A. E. F.

A HAIL AND FAREWELL

BY

FRANCES NEWBOLD NOYES

Hart, Frances Noyes

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BLH

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MY A. E. F.

Because you are the best thing that ever happened to me in my life, I want to tell you so, my A. E. F. You were the most wonderful playmate—the truest comrade—that a lucky girl ever had, and I can't let you go without talking to you just once more. I can't realize that I have lost you—that all the world has lost you—that in such a little while you will have passed like a dream in the night; you, so vivid that you seemed eternal, so alive that it seemed that you could never die, swinging along with that incredible blending of dignity and impudence, a flash of white teeth and shining eyes lighting up your lean young face, singing and swearing in the same breath; never too weary to swagger a little—and God knows that sometimes you were mortally weary; never too bitter to

find a jest—and sometimes, my A. E. F., you were passing bitter; never too rough to fail in gentleness—and there were times when no Sunday school in the universe or its senses would have awarded you a diploma. But no more gallant figure ever swung through the ages than you in your bright youth and your drab khaki; you, with your curly head high and your shoulders back under the weight of the world and an eighty-pound pack; you, with the dreams of an old world and the vision of a new behind those shining eyes of yours—eyes that could be as level as Justice, and as dancing as Folly, and as tender as Pity. How can you be just a memory, you who were more alive than Life itself? You were more friend to me than any friend that I have ever had, dearer than any love, the comrade that we go seeking all our lives. When you saw me standing there by the road down which you were striding, your hand came

out to me quicker than thought and you swung me along with you, small and breathless, and a little frightened, because you were so big that I was wondering whether I could keep up with you, or whether I mightn't be only a bother, after all. But you swore that it was easier to walk with my hand in yours; you never laughed when I took three steps to your one; you never let me go. You made me feel that I was your pal, and your slave, and your goddess—and it's a lucky girl who has even one man to make her feel that. I had a thousand!

There were very few things that we didn't try together. I've served you everything from soup to doughnuts; sold you everything from Fatimas to postage stamps. I've given you everything from Camels and ice-cream to good advice—and my heart; I've hiked hundreds of miles with you, and danced, I verily believe, thousands;

I've sung every song that you ever sang, from the days when we passionately demanded, "Where do we go from here, boys?" to the days when we even more passionately queried, "How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm?"; and when we sang "Hail, hail, the gang's all here!" I didn't substitute "deuce," either. I've ridden with you in side-cars and trucks, freight-cars and river-boats, busses and aeroplanes; I've played auction and pinochle, pitch, and poker with you, and I've even (oh, tell it not in Gath) I've even shot craps. I've ruined innumerable perfectly good games, in spite of the fact that I am able to reason fluently with that adamant young creature, Phoebe Five, and fully understand that four aces beat two pair; but if a fellow has to cut out any language more fervent than "Gee" and can't play for even a quarter of a centime it takes away some of the first fine careless rapture

of the game, doesn't it? And I can pay no higher tribute to your splendid chivalry and superb mendacity, my A.E.F. (of both which qualities you are justly proud) than by saying that never, never did you fail to make me feel that the party would have been a dismal failure without me. I have been in hospitals with you when you were dying, and I had to smile at you, and when I thought that I was, and I had to smile at myself—and that was a good deal the easier of the two. I've written your letters for you, when you hadn't any fingers to write with, or when you hadn't any words—when you had been so brave that you couldn't tell them about it, or when you had been so weak. I think that I have looked at seven hundred and eighty thousand photographs that you carried with you, and once in a while the lady has been so devastatingly plain that I've barely been able to murmur a feeble, "*Hasn't* she got a nice straight

look in her eyes?" and the baby has been so fantastically ugly that I've just managed to gasp heartily but ambiguously, "Well, that *is* a baby!"—but, oh, I've loved them all.

I have taught you my French, and you have taught me yours—and they're both very good languages. I may also state that though the Alexandrines of Racine and Corneille, those companions of my childhood, may grow dimmer and dimmer with age, I firmly expect to go down to my grave saying, "Beaucoup francs," and "Ca ne fait rien," and "Pas compris." "Ah, oui," my A.E.F., we are citizens of the same far country and speakers of the same tongue—I'll say we are! We need no overseas ribbons to identify us; we all have the password. A.w.o.l. has, alas, no mystery for us, nor yet has goldfish, to our sorrow; we aren't ignorant of the technical meaning of salvage, but we occasionally use it to camouflage a short, ugly word that we were wont

to employ; "stealing" isn't fashionable in the A.E.F., but salvaging certainly is. When we say M.P., we don't mean member of parliament, nor do we invariably refer to olive drab when we say O.D. And do we occasionally yield to mirth when one of those unlucky ones who wasn't with us looks at us in pale amazement as we babble lightly on about A.P.M.'s and A.P.O.'s, R.T.O.'s and Q.M.C.'s? Do we? I'll say we do! Though time was, my A.E.F., when we didn't know what even those magic letters stood for; I can remember trying to find out in a sweltering and desperate Washington, and I can remember being told by a sweltering and desperate official that they didn't stand for anything! So maybe we'd better not be too superior.

You've taught me more than your language, my A.E.F. You've taught me that there is nothing better than the average man —the man who is building bridges in Ore-

gon and planting corn in Iowa, driving a truck in Newark or an engine in Nebraska —that, whether he has a cattle ranch in Texas or a hardware store in Tennessee, he is of the stuff of which heroes and comrades are made—because he is the A.E.F.—he is you. I don't idolize you, for all that I love you; well, well do I know your faults—did you ever hide them? Intolerant, arrogant, over-confident; taking for granted that the best is none too good for you; too swift to draw conclusions, too slow to relinquish them; sure that if things are not done as you would do them, they must be done wrong; reckless of consequences to yourself and others—no saint, my A.E.F. But you are the average American, and you are more generous, more chivalrous, more humorous and gentle and gallant and strong and fine than any knight of Arthur's court—and a little maid whose comrade you were for many weary months will love and honor you

until she dies. Because you did something for her that she can never repay—no, not though she served you all her life with the hands and feet and heart and head that were so eager to help you. You took the world that she lived in—her little, narrow, pretty world, full of furs and frills and flowers and foolish pleasant things—you took her little world and made it safe for democracy.

Humanity and democracy! There is a man who uses those words often, and whom they have mocked at for using them, calling them the vague generalities of a visionary. But we—we know, you and I, of what he is speaking; and so long as I live I shall remember that the greatest lesson that you taught me was that those vague generalities were the only realities worth living for—and worth dying for, too. Democracy—we learned that the railroad engineer was just as good a fellow as the railroad magnate; Humanity—that the railroad magnate

is just as good a fellow as the engineer. Because we weren't snobs, were we, my A.E.F.? We weren't snobbish even about the upper classes; they were all right when you got to know them. You see, they were that vague generality, Humanity—and you, who were both human and democratic, learned how ridiculously unimportant were the great accidents of birth and fortune. Why, the only man that we ever knew who could be cheerful and K.P. at the same time was a Harvard graduate whose income ran into higher mathematics!

And because I've loved you so—because we were such pals—I want you to come back to me just once, my A.E.F., before you leave me forever. Come and sit beside me just once more, and let's talk; I've such a lot of things to say. We've had some wonderful talks, haven't we? In the little room at G.H.Q., with the gay curtains that we were making for the gas school turning

its dreariness to brightness and the bitter night outside held at bay by the roaring little stove; the Argonne that you had left behind you a few hours ago, tearing through the mud and rain on your motor-cycle, seemed very far away, but its shadows were in your weary young eyes and on your strained young face. In an hour you must be off again with your despatches through that hateful night—and you must ride without lights. Oh, my A.E.F., sitting there in the shabby room with your tired head in your shaking hands and the thought of that black ride to horror to shake you further—you'll never know how I longed to give you lights! And I kneeled before the little stove, making the coffee that was to give you warmth, broiling the steak that was to give you strength, and praying—I who am not much given to prayer. I think that someone must have heard it, too, because when you left there were the lights of laugh-

ter in your eyes, and your hands were steadied to endurance, and you were whistling under your breath—a reckless, haunting, absurd little tune, that I had danced to half a hundred times. But I cried myself to sleep that night, my A.E.F., because I couldn't bear to think of you, so young, so heart-breakingly young, and so mortally tired, going whistling back through the darkness into that hell.—Do you remember the walks that we used to take back to my billet—a mile and a half through the rain and mud—but, Heavens, how we used to laugh and chatter! All the years that were gone to talk about—all the years to come, if whatever Gods may be were merciful—we planned a new world, there in the rain and the mud. Sometimes your face would be grim enough, and you would announce with bitterness and conviction that you hadn't studied integral calculus for five years to break rocks in the road for five

months; and that when those blanketty blank shavetails drove by, spattering your blue overalls with that everlasting mud, you felt so like a Bolshevik that you could learn Russian in six lessons. But five minutes later the narrow street would be ringing with your laughter!

I remember, too, the first time that you came into my little blue and gold sitting-room in that land of blue and gold that you had been given to play in. The sitting-room was my present to you; for many months I kept it full of flowers for you—there were chocolates for you to eat and cigarettes for you to smoke and magazines for you to look at—in the afternoon there was tea, and in the evening there were little cups of black coffee, and always, always, there was a very small person who loved you, and never got tired of hearing of your dreams, the happy ones and the broken ones, too; we mended a good many of them

between us, you and I—sometimes with laughter, and sometimes, for all that you were so gay and reckless and defiant—sometimes with tears. That first day when you came in it was tea time. You stood in the doorway, so tall that you almost had to stoop, and looked into the gay, kind little room, gleaming with its open fire and rose-colored flowers, its soft lights and its singing kettle, and after a long while, you said, very softly, "Gee." But you said it as though it were a prayer, and there were tears in your eyes—and I understood, my A.E.F. It had been long and long since you had seen a little fire or rosy flowers—a long, dark time since you had heard a kettle singing—and you had wondered too often whether you would ever see or hear them again. Then there was that time in the Louvre. You had on two wound stripes and a Croix de Guerre and a D.S.C.; and when I asked you if you

knew where the Rembrandts were you said yes, and couldn't you show me? We did have the most beautiful time that day. You were from Fall Center, Kansas, you told me, and you had never seen any pictures before; but this was the twelfth time that you had been to the Louvre, so you were making up for lost time. Had I noticed that Holbein over there, and the little Italian Madonna, smiling down at the baby in her arms? You loved the way that she was ignoring you and the general public; most of the pictures seemed to take an undue interest in it! When we got through looking at the special pastel exhibition upstairs, and you had shown me the craps that the early Romans used to shoot, couldn't we have tea together? True, we didn't know each other's names, but we knew that we both liked Titian's Man with the Glove, and a certain lovely shadowy landscape of Corot's, which was much more

important. And how about dinner that evening? They were singing Tosca at the Opera Comique, and you wanted dreadfully to hear it—they didn't sing it in Fall Center. Heavens, how we did talk, my A.E.F., of shoes and ships and sealing-wax for hour after hour, and when we pushed back the coffee cups I thought of how terrifyingly far you had traveled from that little Kansas town, and wondered what you were going to take back to it—whether you would help it with your new knowledge or hurt it with intolerance. Because it is largely in your strong, young hands that the fate of the Fall Centers lie—and through them the fate of America—and through America the fate of the world. Somewhat of a responsibility, isn't it? And you look down at those brown hands of yours with an incredulous and deprecatory smile. Smile away, my A.E.F.! In your heart well you know that it is true. And it's what I want

to talk to you about, in this last talk of all.

Before you go away from us forever—before you wave farewell to us around that last corner—you have one more tale to tell. Day in and day out, night in and night out, in far-off France you dreamed of the incredible day when you would come up the village street through the summer twilight, and see the lamp shining in the window of the little house, and clear the porch hung with honey-suckle in one bound and the narrow threshold in another, and enter into the land of Heart's Desire. Small matter if the village street were called Broadway or Main Street or Orchard Lane—for you the twilight was always sweet with flowers, and the light was always shining in the window. But when you found your breath—when the wonder of it all ebbed enough to let you find words again—what did you tell those eager ones, my A.E.F.? There were so many

things that they wanted to know; they had been waiting, bewildered and dazed by all the words and all the books and all the papers, until you came back to tell them what had really happened. Because they were so sure that you must know—why, you were theirs, and you had been there—on your words hung all the law and the prophets! What did you tell them, my A.E.F.?

You have been back long enough now to see things pretty clearly—long enough, I believe, to regret some of the quick and bitter judgments that you passed with your tongue—never, never, with your heart. Long enough to see that America has great need, in these hard days, of faith and hope and charity—and that the greatest of these is charity. You, my comrade, were the defender of her ideals—you are still their guardian. If, careless and unthinking, you belittle the dreams for which you fought—if you belittle those who fought beside you and

those who tried to help you fight, you are unfaithful to that trust. For there are many who are wondering, sick at heart, whether the game was worth the candle of their sacrifice and yours, if the tales that they have heard are true.

What of the War? Of the French, of the British, of the Germans? Of the Y and the Red Cross? Of the officers and of the men? Tell them true, my A.E.F., tell them true! Here in America to-day, we are fighting another War—perhaps an even greater one—a war against selfishness and materialism and intolerance and hatred. It will be a losing fight if we go armed only with suspicion and bitterness and despair. You must give us other weapons to fight with—enduring faith in others, enduring trust in ourselves. That is why I am asking you to tell them, before you go, the real story of what you found over there—so that they may find courage, over here. Don't

pass on the catchwords that you have bandied about amongst you—tell them the truth, as you have finally tested it out for yourself, as you have drawn it from out the well of your heart.

Because they are going to believe you—and you dare not play them false.

What of the War? It is hard for us to realize how much of it America has forgotten—how incredibly much of it she never knew. To us, my A.E.F., even when months had passed after that unforgettable day in November, it was still the realest thing in the world—far realer than the lovely, shadowy, silvery figure of Peace that had stolen quietly in to take its place. We were still living in the ruin and wreck that it had left behind; how could we forget it? Its red hand was on us still—holding back the trains on which we traveled, turning us from the destinations where we would go, hurling us into strange and hated

places, doling out to us the same detested meat and drink that its savage hospitality had offered us of old, lashing us on to keep our rifles bright, our bayonets sharp, driving our tired feet to the old drills, turning our tired faces to new problems. It wasn't very easy to forget it—its fingers were still at our throats! Even now, going quietly about our business in the gay serenity of the little towns or the triumphant clamor of the great ones, we pause sometimes with quick-caught breath and startled eyes—remembering, remembering—until this charmed security seems the dream—that far-off nightmare the reality. But the things which were daily bread to us are dust and ashes to the ones who loved us best.

You found that the bits of colored cloth that you wore on your shoulders, your joy and pride and common knowledge, spoke an alien tongue to them. The little scarlet "1" which to some of you was dearer than

your heart's blood—they didn't know whether it stood for the first army or the first regiment or the first corps or the first division—and hideous to relate, my A.E.F., they didn't care! The Indian star that shone so bravely—and that for some of you shone brighter than the morning and the evening star together—for them shed no special radiance. All the numbers that made your heart beat faster and your souls exult—two and six, three and two, four and two, eight and nine—I could fill this page with their music, but to them they were numbers, nothing more. When you landed in New Jersey that gray morning and limped laughing back into your heritage, there was an eager stranger who asked you, pointing to your overseas ribbon with its galaxy of bronze stars, how you got your Croix de Guerre—and you told him with a smile that it wasn't exactly a Croix de Guerre; and a still more eager

friend asked, pointing to your D.S.C., what campaign that ribbon stood for. The radiance never faded from your smile while you explained to him that it wasn't exactly a campaign ribbon, but your eyes were suddenly shadowed with an immense bewilderment. Your ribbons! It was all very well for you to laugh at them, and to inform the awe-stricken public that the French gave away Croix de Guerres for cigarettes —the unadorned ribbon for Meccas, the bronze star for Camels, and the palm for Egyptian Deities—it was fair enough to you to insist that in your outfit they issued D.S.C.'s instead of socks—but in your heart you had firmly believed that the very cats in the streets would know the unutterable meaning and the inestimable value of those bright bits of patterned silk. It was fairly staggering. Possibly they thought that the white stars on the blue ribbon of the Medal of Honor stood for the number of Liberty

Bonds that the family had purchased? Why, a very lovely lady calmly informed me that one of my friends had been awarded the S.O.S. for bravery. If it didn't move you to despairing mirth it would make you cry.

There's no denying it; as far as they are concerned the war is so dead that it would make Julius Cæsar or a doornail seem animated. Perhaps that's just as well, and sane and right and normal. While it was alive, it was even more alive for many of them than it was for us; we mustn't ever forget that. For them it had all the terrible intensity of a nightmare, instead of being the deadly commonplace horror that it was for us. For them, it was always Tom or Dick or Harry doing something frightful with a bayonet or a hand-grenade, or having something even more frightful done to him. They didn't realize that what you dreaded infinitely more than the actual fighting—which after all, in its brief and lurid flashes,

seemed like a bad dream—was the everlasting hiking; arriving at night all in from thirty kilometers, and finding that you had ten more to hike; the everlasting rain and mud and cold; the everlasting hunger, occasionally appeased by the succulent hard tack, the abominated corned Bill and goldfish, less occasionally mocked with a few spoonfuls of cold canned tomatoes; and that worse hunger of loneliness, a very passion of homesickness and longing and despair—the misery of a frightened child alone in the dark, with morning a great way off. That longing did not die with the armistice, my A.E.F. It throve in the gray little French villages, in the bright little German ones; it walked with you by day and lay with you by night; it never loosed your hand until you went up the gang-plank. It was our last battle, and we fought it together. After all, it's just as well that there are a great many things that they have forgotten—a

great many that they'll never have to forget, because they never knew them; even if they *do* think that Belleau Woods is a part of the Argonne Forest, it isn't going to shake the progress of the world! Let them forget the war that you fought, my A.E.F.; but never, never while you have words to speak and breath with which to speak them, let them forget why it was you fought it. Sometimes it almost seems that they are forgetting even that. You fought so that all men might share your hard-won heritage of freedom and liberty—and because you loved her very dearly, for a little space you left the lovely lady with the torch, so that she might lift it even higher when she welcomed you home. There are some who tell us that we have done our task, that we must draw aside—that the torch is shining for us alone, and not for all mankind. I think that they are trying to cheat us of the very fruit of our victory—the glory of

helping a tired and broken world to its feet. There are some of them—and I hold them a trifle lower than Benedict Arnold—who wish to take the laurels that you have brought them, and twist and warp and strain them into an ugly political weapon. They say (and it is strange hearing for us, my A.E.F.) that America must play safe. Play safe! We had forgotten that that was considered policy. With us it meant shame and dishonor and an ugly death while day was breaking for the world—how if it should mean that for America? Oh, tell them, tell them, those blind ones, that you, who have fought to give a weary world peace, will fight to keep it. You are a soldier, my A.E.F., and you dare not play safe.

What of those friends who fought by our side—what account are you going to give of them? Let's take the two that you knew best—Tommy Atkins and Jacques Poilu.

Since I'm talking to you and not to the peace conference, I'm not going to pretend that your face lights up at the mention of these gentlemen, or that a burst of lyric enthusiasm wells from your fervent heart to your fervent lips. It doesn't. They have fallen victim to some of your most animated and unwarranted catchwords. You don't have to tell me what you *say* about them—I know it only too well. What I want you to tell the breathless little group sitting on the back porch or in the front parlor is what you *think* about them. Only, most dear and most heedless, do a little thinking first. You can, when you put your mind to it.

Tommy first. Of course, you never really did see much of him. Your principal grievance against him was that you had a very disagreeable time coming over in his ships, and that when you got to Winchester (or its equivalent) the only fatted calf that he

offered to the American prodigal was what you bitterly paraphrased as "jaam and tay," substituted for breakfast, dinner and supper. Alas, poor Tommy, he gave you the best that he had—and he went short even on that, so that you might come over on those reviled ships of his—and if it hadn't been for those same reviled ships, you might never have had a chance to experiment with jam and tea, or salmon and corned beef, or vin rouge and vin blanc. Which means that you might never have gotten over at all, my A.E.F. The real difficulty was that you thought that you had met Tommy before, under very unpleasant circumstances indeed; and you pranced over to meet him again with a mind that was about as open as a safe with a forgotten combination, and a traveling equipment of a chip on either shoulder. It was true that you had met someone who was using his name before—a heavily dis-

guised, blustering, tyrannical individual introduced to you as Mr. Atkins by a smooth-spoken, ingratiating old party known as German Propaganda. The first time that you met him you were a very small, freckle-faced, bored little boy, sitting on a hard bench and reading the letter of introduction that German Propaganda had written to you in a little book called "History of the U.S.A." He took great pains to state what a wicked and unprincipled fellow Tommy had been, and how he'd tried to steal everything that you held dearest from you; and while he professed faint hopes that the scalawag might have reformed, he managed to stress the crime a good deal more than the reformation. But he didn't tell you that George Third, the old Prussian who started the Revolutionary War, was so German that he could hardly speak English; that the war was so unpopular in England that they had to hire Hessians to

fight it; that all her greatest men railed against it in and out of season. He was very discreet about these facts, wasn't he? And the next time that he introduced his Mr. Atkins was only a few years ago, and he was almost in tears over his dreadful conduct; he gave us fair warning that the unscrupulous wretch had subsidized our press and bribed the casual observer and corrupted our officials to such an extent that it was impossible to believe a word that they said, and he assured us that the fairy tales that they were indulging in anent wicked little Belgium and haughty and degenerate France were enough to make the blood of an honest German run cold. So that it was this purely fictitious Tommy that you went to meet—only he isn't the one that the little group listening in the twilight are waiting to hear about. They want to hear about the real one—the one who got up in the gray light of a London dawn to give you so pas-

sionate a welcome that it fairly took your breath away—the one that you found later with his back against a ruined wall in France, fighting, fighting, bloody and broken and white to the lips, but managing, somehow, to throw you a little, stiff, tortured grin, and managing, too, by his own grit and the grace of God, to carry on. If you ran into him in France, that is how you saw him—and if you didn't, don't pass on any picturesque gossip that you will make a little more picturesque in passing. Someone might believe it. But you might tell them about Tommy's younger brothers —the Australians, the Canadians, the New Zealanders and South Africans—you loved them like your own, didn't you, Yank? You'll tell the world you did!

How about Jacques Poilu? You had another name for him, and you used it with more energy than discretion. For a good

many months you made his own land echo with your plaints as to the devious ways of the "frog." He got in your way when you were driving; he wrung every sou that you possessed from your feeble and reluctant fingers; his offspring made life a burden to you with their clamors for "ceegaretts" and "chooeen-gom"; his feminine relatives pursued you tirelessly, unsolicited victims of your fatal fascination. All very, very harrowing. I used to try conscientiously to reconcile this pathetic picture of the martyred young exile with the A.E.F. that I saw before my puzzled eyes, a vivid figure of mischief and resourcefulness and recklessness and sheer, heart-warming charm, playing endless games of ball and marbles in the little parks and narrow streets with the enchanted children, listening with beautiful deference to the incomprehensible tales of the old grandmothers in the doorways, flirting assiduously and debonairly with

the velvet-eyed girls, bargaining and chaffing and swapping stories with Jacques himself. True, he got in your way when you were driving—but at the rate at which you went it was a little difficult to keep out of your way, my A.E.F.; true, he cheated you often, but in that land which we are firmly convinced is God's country, your own people cheated you quite as energetically—I saw them do it; true, his children begged shamelessly from you—but you taught them to do it, and filled their eager little hands in spite of any and all protests, and did your level best to spoil them forever; true, the maidens of the land fell victim to your charm—but you asserted it brazenly, my dear, and seemed to take a melancholy satisfaction in the results. Was all this just an optical illusion on my part? Sometimes I used to feel that one of us must be the victim of an hallucination—because surely no one in his sane senses would continue to lavish af-

fection and attention on the object of his disparagement! Perhaps I was just dreaming that I hardly ever saw you without some Gallic mite perched on your shoulder or clinging to your hand or trotting at your side—dreaming that you were everlastingly polishing those boots of yours so that pretty Marie Adelaide Therese could see her face in them—dreaming that you steadily persisted in breaking every rule of the canteen in order to purchase cigarettes and chocolates for "them frog guys that hadn't any of their own"—dreaming that you would linger time and time again to tell me of your adored and adoring landlady—"Honest, she treats me like a prince; believe me, if I was her own kid, she couldn't treat me better. I want to get her a present; you tell me what she'd like, Petite." Why, the very nickname that you gave to me was borrowed from France—and I loved it—and you—and her. I wasn't dreaming;

but I'm thinking that perhaps sometimes you were, my A.E.F.

I haven't much to say to you about the Germans, largely because I find that when I try to talk about them I lose my voice and my temper and my sense of humor and a good many other things worth hanging on to. Besides, I think that you can lose all of them just as well as I can! Of course, when you paid them a visit last fall you found that you were pretty nearly comfortable for the first time in many weary months, and it rather went to your head. You found yourself wondering whether people who offered you the best bed in the place with guttural noises of welcome and hospitality could be demons incarnate, and somehow you counted it for righteousness to them that there wasn't any shell hole in the side of the house. But it didn't take long for the first glow to wear off, and before many moons had passed you had

pounced on the illuminating discovery that when even the most inspired demon had the choice between being affable or being shot at dawn, he'd jolly well be affable. And if you'll just tell your breathless listeners some of the things that you told me about the individuals that you soberly referred to as "those damned Dutch—excuse *me,* lady," I'll be perfectly contented—perfectly.

About the "Y" and the Red Cross and the other organizations that went over there to help you, I do want to talk to you—and if you are inclined to feel resentful of anything that I may say, I want you to remember, my A.E.F., that it's because I love you so that I can't bear to have you either ungrateful or ungracious—and because I am afraid that you will have to own that you have been both. To save my life I can't understand your attitude towards us who so longed to help you; who worked our fingers to the bone, morning, night and noon, to

give you a little comfort and a little happiness. I am speaking now of "us" as organizations, not as individuals. On the individual girl you lavished such a wealth of gratitude and praise that you left her humbled and bewildered and a little intoxicated; but on the organization of which she was a symbol you have heaped unceasing criticism and unstinted blame. I myself happen to be a Y girl; and I have never ceased to be proud and glad of that fact. The only thing that I was prouder of than the triangle on my sleeve was the U. S. on my collar! So this isn't an apology on my part—it's an accusation. I dare wager that the only organization over there for which you have a good word to say is the one that you saw the least of—the one that, in nine cases out of ten, you never saw at all. The Salvation Army, with its tiny band and uncomplex duties, did splendid work; but no more splendid work than was done by the

other organizations that were woven into the very fabric of your daily lives. I say that advisedly. Look up, for example, the number of Y workers killed, wounded, cited and decorated for bravery in trying desperately to help you who were so heedless of their help; where will you find, amongst your own ranks, a non-combatant outfit with such a record? Many a combatant one might glory in it! You were almost invariably lamentably ungenerous to the men who, under no pressure of the draft, had given up fine positions safe at home to come over and slave and drudge for you who found no word or commendation for them. If they were unflaggingly cheerful, you dismissed it as "sunshine-stuff," and "taffy"; if they were occasionally human and irritable, you rent the heavens above and the earth beneath with your outraged cries, and tore to the Y for paper so that you could write home at once to Aunt Minnie and tell her

to get back that fifty cents that she gave to the misguided organization in September. I honestly do blush for you. You would take everything that the Y gave you—every mortal thing—and apparently thought that by accepting our gifts you canceled your debt. We, you assured us complacently, were merely the instruments of the American people, kindly selected by them to see that their contributions reached you safely. Well, we happened to be the American people ourselves, and besides giving you our money, we gave you our time and our strength and our hearts and our lives—and some of us were absurd enough to wonder why it was that you did not go on your knees to us—not to us, the individuals, amongst whom there were those who were faint-hearted and dishonest and bad tempered and incompetent, because we happened to be human beings—but to us as an organization, because time and time and

time again we were all the happiness and all the comfort and all the refuge from despair that you had. I have never been in one Y hut (and I have been in many; we had two thousand for you!) that was not crowded to the doors. Tell me—tell me, my A.E.F., how could you take so much and give so little? For you took, day after day, and night after night, our service and our shelter, our light and our warmth, everything from baseballs to Bibles; books and vaudevilles; magazines and movies; writing paper and music—and every single thing you took for granted. If you never used the Y, then all that I am saying is not for you; but cross your heart and hope to die, my A.E.F., didn't you use it constantly? If there were times when we weren't with you, it was because, alas, we couldn't be everywhere—and when you seemed to need us most, there was often no way to get to you. Surely you must have

realized that when the Army couldn't even get your corned beef up to you it wouldn't permit us to bring you chocolates! I want you to tell Aunt Minnie, who gave us the fifty cents for you, and Dad and Mother, who gave five dollars, and little Bobby, who gave a nickel, the truth about us—for their sake as much as for ours, and most of all, for Truth's. You needn't soften it down or touch it up a bit. If you discovered a Y man who was a thorough and consistent grouch or one who charged you five centimes more than you thought was justifiable, tell them the whole horrible tale; but in the name of justice and fair play and common decency, my A.E.F., tell them about the other times—the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of other times when the Y was all that you had and when you used it mercilessly. If I am speaking only of the Y, it is because I knew it best and because it gave me the joy of being

with you for many months, and so I am eternally grateful to it; but I want you to tell them the truth about every organization over there that stretched out a hand to you—because, by and large, it makes as beautiful a story as even the most exacting audience could care to hear. And for my sake, because I was a Y girl, and because we loved each other, please go out of your way to tell them about every place that you found us, from the God-forsaken little mud-hole where we had laboriously rigged up a movie machine and dug up a stove to burn for you, and hot chocolate in a tin can, and a wheezy graphophone to sing about the little gray home, and where we were duly exultant that we could get so much, and pretty sad that it was so little—to the incredible loveliness of the leave-areas, where we took the most wonderful casinos set in the most wonderful scenery in the world, and flung the doors wide and

asked you to come in and play with us—to see the best shows and hear the best singing and eat the best food that could be found—to dance on the best floors to the best music that you ever heard—and with the best dancers, too, though they did wear flowered aprons and had to run back to the canteen between times to give you ice cream. I can't believe that if you were ever our guest at one of our seven-day house parties—and at my house we used to entertain over three thousand a week!—I can't believe that you could help getting a little hot and uncomfortable when you remembered some of the things that you have said about us. Because you swore that you had never had such a wonderful time, and that you would never, never forget it. Have you forgotten, my A.E.F.? Gratitude and fair play and common justice are good things to remember. Remember them now!

It's getting late—and there's such a lot

that I must leave unsaid. Never was the day made long enough for us to talk in; always twilight fell before we knew it, and we had time only for the word that we wanted least to say—we always hated "Good-bye." Now it is time to go and talk to them, who are waiting to hear you before you go forever. Only just let's sit here for a minute longer, with no words at all. We don't need them, do we? It's so quiet in the little street; it makes our terrible and beautiful adventure seem like a dream. The honey-suckle and the locust smell sweeter even than our memories of them and the lights are coming out one by one in the little houses—and tired people are coming home to rest. It's all so peaceful and homely and exquisite; someone is cutting the grass next door, and the little girls skipping rope look like white butterflies, and far down the street a woman is calling: "Johnny! Johnny—supper-time,

dear!" Oh, America, America, how we have learned to love you, we who thought that we might have lost you forever! And well do we know that in your quiet street lie adventures more thrilling than any we have had—romances more wonderful than any we have dreamed. For in your quiet streets lies the Future.

All the little lights are shining in the windows, and the last one is lighted in the west—the evening star. Do you remember the rhyme that we used to say when we were little? Give me your hand, my A.E.F., and we'll wish on the first star in the darkness before you go.

"Star light, star bright,
Very first star I've seen to-night,
Wish I may, wish I might
Have the wish I wish to-night."

I wish, my A.E.F., that you may give to America, before you leave her, your deathless courage and imperishable strength,

your ringing laughter and your beautiful gentleness, your splendid enthusiasm and your eternal youth. I wish that you may give her your soul.

And so farewell to you, my A.E.F. Turn once more to wave to me at the cross-roads —even though my eyes cannot see you for the foolish tears, my heart sees you well— tall and young and splendid in your khaki, waving farewell to me with that exultant laugh of yours—eager to be off, eager to be away. When you have turned the corner, I will see you still. I will see you always. So I will smile too, and wave, too, and be glad that you have come and glad that you have gone—still young and unbroken and triumphant. Best comrade and truest lover and dearest playmate—hail and farewell, my A.E.F.!

A few extracts from the many letters received by Miss Noyes after "My A. E. F." appeared in McClure's Magazine.

From a Member of the U. S. Army Postal Service

I was lucky enough to have seen many of the very phases of the "A. E. F." you mention, while staying with the boys on five of the drives. And I want to express to you my appreciation of the whole-souled work of your "Y" and yourself individually. I met you once, I remember, and I recollect your word of cheer to the weary ones and your smile of welcome to the homesick lads, and the "A. E. F." owes you a debt they can never pay. When I think of such as you, of "Pop" Reeves with the 78th, of that big-hearted, tireless worker with the Engineers in that forgotten village outside of Verdun, of those fine men and women with us on that drive from Amiens to Bohain with the Second Army Corps; when I think of these and

many more I knew personally, I see how no one could criticize them.

Mistakes were made, plenty of them, by every organization connected with the army. But why blame the mistakes of a few men on the whole organization? Most of the reports of the "Y" were second-hand and but few men I heard knew personally of any fault; it was always some friend had told them, etc. Even some of the stories were changed so little that you could always recognize that particular brand, though the place and location was always different, of course.

I was connected with the Postal Agency and was with many units and outfits and hence had opportunity for observation, as I was with fighting units all the time. Your article certainly goes into my war scrap book with big headlines as the very best magazine article I have seen.

I had to laugh, yes, and cry, too, as I read your story, for somehow both laughter and tears seem nearer the surface since being "over there." In fact the whole experience stirred up emotions a fellow did not know he ever possessed. How could a fellow know what he would do or say when going up towards the Front on the Toul Sector when he witnessed the camions of refugees coming out of the zone of fire, some of the children wounded, some mothers with bandaged heads with the blood in a tiny stream down their faces showing how far back the German high explosives came. As they saw for the first time the Americans going in and when the driver told them of the Americans going in to their relief, they smiled and cheered and waved their hands to us as we went by and yelled "Vive l'Amerique." Did a fellow know that he would wave to them and yell "Vive la France" until he had a sore throat and a husky voice and the tears had streaked

through the dust on his face until the white showed through. Well, he did.

But there are too many times and too many occasions to mention. You know them all. I just simply wish to thank you for what your story makes us remember more vividly, for the message it should carry to every one who was "over there," for the notions it will change for many who do not know the real message you carried and the wonderful help you were to us all.

From a First Division Private

I have just finished reading your story entitled "My A. E. F." and I want to congratulate you, for it sure rings true. I ought to know because I was one of the first men in France with the First Division and fought up until the armistice with them. In closing I want to say that you sure have a wonderful way of explaining such a tangled-up affair!

From an "A. E. Fer" of the 33rd Division

Your article shows more of the true spirit of our indomitable American girl than anything I have read. There is a tribute to the A. E. F. that every man should glory in. You have expressed the true state of affairs in regard to the Y. M. C. A. also. Perhaps I have, with others, inwardly cussed certain individuals with the "Y" at times. But no A. E. F. man can truthfully say that he did not spend many a happy hour in the "Y."

From a former Captain in the 90th Division

The rarest of gifts has been given to you, the gift of writing in such a direct, appealing way that one cannot help but feeling that you are sitting in the old oak chair by the fireplace pouring out your thoughts to him. You have a wonderful command of the English language, but more wonderful

still is your deep understanding of human nature. Your power of observation is a rare gift, but rarer still is your broad tolerance of the whims and shortcomings of mankind, a tolerance so deep, so understanding, so God-given that the meanest and roughest of us of your A. E. F. revealed some few short flashes of virtue and strength.

Yes, "Petite," we were intolerant, arrogant, over-confident, and far, far too swift to draw conclusions. In a mean, narrow way, forgetting all the difficulties that the "Y" encountered, all the lack of assistance and encouragement that should have been given by the highest army officers down to the lowest buck-private, I, too, wrote home to "Aunt Minnie" and told her to stop her monthly contributions to the misguided organization. Had I taken time to think the matter over in a sober and tolerant manner, I know that the letter would never have been written.

From a former Captain in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces

As a member of the C. E. F. with 33 months' service in France, I venture to write and express my appreciation of the charming way in which you refer to the soldiers of the Allies of the United States—British and French. Your appeal to your men to be guided by their own opinions, and not by those of others—so often I fear of propagandists who would stir up distrust of England and France—is so eminently sane and is what is so much required just now.

There are many here who would create the same feeling in Canada against the United States and it is only by writing such as yours that a continuance of the *entente* which existed during the war can be maintained.

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